

CLAIMS:

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39. (New) A multi-bit driver comprising:

a longitudinal housing including a bit chuck having a tool bit receiving channel, and plurality of actuator channels, and defining a longitudinal axis;

a plurality of tool bits nested within said housing in a retracted position;

actuating means for selectively extending said tool bits from said retracted position to an extended position whereat the selected tool bit projects from said tool bit receiving channel, and retracting the selected tool bit from said extended position to said retracted position;

wherein said bit chuck precludes said tool bit from rotating axially when in said extended position; and,

locking means for locking said tool bit in said extended position;

wherein each said actuating means is adapted to be easily

deflected in a radial direction with respect to said longitudinal axis and resists deflection in a transverse direction relative thereto, to operably align the selected tool bit with said tool bit receiving channel as said tool bit is urged into said extended position.

40.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein each said actuating means is flexible.

41.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein each said actuating means includes a bit extension operably connected at one end to one of said tool bits and at the other end operably slideably connected to said housing, such that said bit extension is guided slidably along said actuator channel.

42.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said locking means comprises a locking groove in each said tool bit and a locking member selectively movable into contact with said locking groove.

43.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 42, wherein said locking member comprises a steel ball.

44.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, further comprising fastening means connected to said bit extension for slidably connecting said bit extension to said housing.

45.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said tool bits are substantially longitudinally aligned with said longitudinal axis when in said extended position.

46.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said tool bits are substantially longitudinally aligned with said longitudinal axis when in said retracted position.

47.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said bit extension has a planar profile with a width greater than its thickness.

48.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 48, wherein said bit extension has a thickness to width ratio of at least 1 : 1.5.

49.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 48, wherein said bit extension has a thickness to width ratio of at least 1 : 3.0.

50.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said tool bit has a hexagonally shaped shank and chuck receiving channel of said bit chuck is adapted to receive said hexagonally shaped shank therein.

51.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said actuating means operates to extend said tool bit by longitudinal motion in one direction and retract said tool bit by longitudinal motion in the opposite direction.

52.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 51, wherein said longitudinal motion is effected using a single finger or thumb pressure.

53.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 52, wherein said actuating means comprises an actuator knob partially projecting externally of said housing for the application of finger pressure thereto.

54.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, wherein said housing includes a cone proximate said bit chuck, said cone having an interior guide surface for slidably guiding tool bits into alignment with said bit chuck as tool bits are urged into said extended position.

55.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 54, wherein said cone is disposed between said retracted tool bits and said bit chuck for guiding tool bits into alignment with said bit chuck as tool bits are urged into said extended position.

56.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 55, wherein said cone is an integral part of said housing.

57.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 39, further comprising guide means for maintaining said bit extensions separate one from another and nested proximate the inner surface of said housing, and for guiding said bit extension as said tool bits are urged between said extended and retracted positions.

58.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 57, wherein said guide means includes a guide including guide faces for slideably receiving said bit assemblies, thereby maintaining said bit assemblies spaced apart within said housing.

59.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 58, wherein said guide means further comprises a guide support connected at one end to said guide and at an opposite other end to an end cap.

60.(New) A multi-bit driver comprising:

a longitudinal housing including a bit chuck having a tool bit receiving channel, and a plurality of actuator channels, and defining a longitudinal axis;

a plurality of bit assemblies each including a tool bit,

said bit assemblies incorporated in said housing;

actuating means for selectively extending tool bits from said retracted position to an extended position whereat the selected tool bit projects from said a tool bit receiving channel, and retracting the selected tool bit from said extended position to said retracted position;

wherein said bit chuck precludes said tool bit from rotating axially when in said extended position; and,

locking means for locking said tool bit in said extended position;

wherein each said bit assembly is adapted to be easily deflected in a radial direction with respect to said longitudinal axis and resists deflection in a transverse direction relative thereto, to operably align the selected tool bit with said tool bit receiving channel as said tool bit is urged into said extended position.

61.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein each said bit assembly includes a bit extension operably connected at one end to one of said tool bit and at the other end operably slideably connected to said housing, such that said bit extension is guided slidably along said actuator channel.

62.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said bit chuck has a chuck receiving channel.

63.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said locking means comprises a locking groove in each said tool bit and a locking member selectively movable into contact with said locking groove.

64.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 63, wherein said locking member comprises a steel ball.

65.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, further comprising fastening means connected to said bit extension for slidably connecting said bit extension to said housing.

66.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said tool bits are substantially longitudinally aligned with said longitudinal axis when in said extended position.

67.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said tool bits are substantially longitudinally aligned with said longitudinal axis when in said retracted position.

68.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said bit extension has a planar profile with a width greater than its thickness.

69.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 68, wherein said bit extension has a thickness to width ratio of at least 1 : 1.5.

70.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 69, wherein said bit extension has a thickness to width ratio of at least 1 : 3.0.

71.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said tool bit has a hexagonally shaped shank and chuck receiving channel of said bit chuck is adapted to receive said hexagonally shaped shank therein.

72.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said actuating means operates to extend said tool bit by longitudinal motion in one direction and retract said tool bit by longitudinal motion in the opposite direction.

73.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 72, wherein said longitudinal motion is effected using a single finger or thumb pressure.

74.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 73, wherein said actuating means comprises an actuator knob partially projecting externally of said housing for the application of finger pressure thereto.

75.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, wherein said housing includes a cone proximate said bit chuck, said cone having an interior guide surface for slidably guiding tool bits into alignment with said bit chuck as tool bits are urged into said extended position.

76.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 75, wherein said cone is disposed between said retracted tool bits and said bit chuck for guiding tool bits into alignment with said bit chuck as tool bits are urged into said extended position.

77.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 76, wherein said cone is an integral part of said housing.

78.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 60, further comprising guide means for maintaining said bit extensions separate one from another and nested proximate the inner surface of said housing, and for guiding said bit extension as said tool bits are urged between said extended and retracted positions.

79.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 78, wherein said

guide means includes a guide including guide faces for slideably receiving said bit assemblies, thereby maintaining said bit assemblies spaced apart within said housing.

80.(New) The multi-bit driver claimed in claim 79, wherein said guide means further comprises a guide support connected at one end to said guide and at an opposite other end to an end cap.